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S P E E C H

OF

MR. J. F. BELL, OF KENTUCKY,

ON

THE OREGON QUESTION,

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES,

*February 4, 1846.*

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## SPEECH.

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The resolution reported by the Committee on Foreign Affairs directing notice of twelve months to be given to terminate the Convention with Great Britain for the joint occupation of Oregon, being under consideration in Committee of the Whole on the State of the Union—

Mr. BELL, of Kentucky, having obtained the floor, on his suggestion the House adjourned. On the meeting of the House next day, Mr. B. commenced by returning his profoundest acknowledgments to the Committee of the Whole House for its courtesy in rising yesterday, and indulging him with the possession of the floor this morning. He said he would endeavor to compensate the committee for their kindness by the brevity of his remarks, by the utmost brevity compatible with an explicit expression of his opinion on this most important subject. For (said Mr. B.) this is a subject of greatest consequence—of an importance which justly causes it to rise above all local and sectional interests—above all factious and party considerations. It involves directly in its discussion the acquisition, or rather retention, of a large extent of valuable territory; and upon our action here depend, in some measure, peace and war. The interest felt upon it, and upon our action, is widespread—nay, sir, it is universal. It is felt here by us who participate in this discussion, and by our constituents at home; and the probability of a war between England and the United States, the two greatest nations of the earth, awakens the anxious expectation of the world; and already have the questions which arise from this subject been announced upon the continent of Europe, and by the British minister, as the most momentous which can now or hereafter affect the relations of civilized nations. And, therefore, questions such as this, should be approached in the spirit of patriotism rather than of party; in that comprehensive and catholic spirit which looks not to a section or State, but to the whole country, and to its vast and diversified interests as a unit. It is to me a subject of rejoicing, and to the country one of congratulation, that in this spirit, thus far, with few exceptions, has this debate progressed. All candid men will admit, and none but the bigots of party will deny, that great national questions, which relate directly to our foreign intercourse, should ever be kept aloof from those which refer to the administration of home affairs. The strifes which the latter engender are sufficiently embittered without the addition of the other, which only add intensity to the bitterness, and fierceness to the strife, and are calculated to prevent an enlightened and patriotic judgment on both.

And the difficulties which now unfortunately surround this subject have their origin in that “disastrous conjunction” of domestic and foreign policy, which, for party purposes, was made at the Baltimore convention, during the year 1844, by the wise men there assembled to promulgate the true democratic faith. Yes, sir, if this question had been raised by the people themselves, rather than by the restless agitators who were there gathered together to give direction to the political current, that they might float to office and to power; if Oregon, “the whole of Oregon or none,” had not been made “the battle-cry” in the late Presidential election, many of the embarrassments which now surround the negotiations on this subject would not exist.

But that august assemblage announced to the world, in one of its oracular resolutions—oracular at least in the cunningly devised duplicity of its language—that our title to the whole of Oregon was clear, and pledged its members, and the power of the whole party, to the *re-occupation* of Oregon, and the *re-annexation* of Texas, at the earliest *practicable* period. Permit me to remark, in passing, that the short syllable *re* has, according to democratic construction, a remarkable magic, for no other word would suit but the *re-annexation* of Texas, which had never been annexed, and nothing but *re-occupation* of Oregon, from the occupancy of which we never have been displaced.

The President of the United States, regarding the resolution of the convention as a letter of instructions, in his Inaugural address, endorsed the opinion that our title to the whole of Oregon was clear and indisputable; and not gifted with powers of casuist-

try equal to some of the members of this House, who were also members of that convention, he supposes that the present is the earliest practicable period for the accomplishment of the desired *re-occupation* of Oregon; whilst those members who thought that the *re-annexation* of Texas meant immediately, *if not sooner*, suppose the *re-occupation* of Oregon means a year or two years hence, or *never*, according to the particular opinion of each individual. And the difference of interpretation to the same language has given rise to some appeals to party on this floor, which are calculated to excite merriment. The gentleman from Illinois (Mr. WENTWORTH) has appealed to the members of the democratic party, who are disposed to oppose the passage of the resolution giving notice, by the recollection of their common association and cordial union at Baltimore, and by the still stronger and more urgent demand of a compliance with the terms of what, by implication, he asserts was a compact between the friends of Texas and Oregon, and by the assurance that the Northern and Western democracy have fulfilled their part, and voted (gone it blind, to borrow the gentleman's language,) for Texas, and that now is the time for the Southern democracy to pay up, and go for Oregon. Other members of the democratic party on this floor are inclined to read out of the democratic church those who supported the nominee of the Baltimore convention; but now, having elected him, are disposed to vote against the notice, which he recommends as one of the necessary steps to the *re-occupation* of Oregon.

With the harmonizing of these family quarrels I have nothing to do, or with the reading out of the democratic church its recreant and contumacious members; but protest against all those being read into that church, who advocate the notice. It is to me a matter of rejoicing that the Whigs on this floor are permitted, on this great national question, to follow the dictates of duty, the suggestions of patriotism, unaffected by the open and influential dictation of party conventions, or the no less powerful, though more secret, appliances of cliques and caucuses.

It is a useless consumption of time, at this late day of the debate, to detain the committee with a discussion of the title to Oregon—various sources of title are supposed to exist, but I will *not* go into them; I will not go into a technical construction of treaties between Spain and England to ascertain their actual or legal meaning; nor into the grant by the “British kings, to the early and adventurous colonists, which gave the right to conquer and colonize from sea to sea;” nor examine the claim from continuity and contiguity of territory; nor of the claim resulting from the genius and spirit of our people, and the eternal laws of nature; nor from “the manifest destiny of the republic;” nor from our power to whip England, and, by force of our own swords, take and maintain Oregon.

All these have been relied on with great earnestness and confidence; but most of them are so indefinite, that the time may yet come when our claim may settle down on the two last named, *Destiny* and *Power*, and they become important links in the strong chain which binds Oregon to us. For the history of the world, from the earliest establishment of empires among men, proves, that when contiguous territory is necessary to the general, political, or commercial welfare of a particular people, and they have the power to take and keep it, its acquisition becomes a matter of “manifest destiny;” it is not always right, for it is sometimes the “manifest destiny” of nations to do wrong.

It is not necessary, to the discussion of the issues which legitimately arise in this debate, to define precisely how much of Oregon our title covers—whether from the 42d parallel of north latitude to 49° 51' 54", or 61st degree of same latitude, all these different degrees having been assumed, by different speakers, as the correct boundaries. It is only necessary to say, that the adjustment and settlement of a boundary is emphatically the subject of negotiation—not of legislation—and falls peculiarly within the province of the President and Senate, as the treaty-making power, and not of Congress, the law-making power. And, on great questions like this, each department must act within the particular limits prescribed by the Constitution; each under a sense of its own responsibilities. And, as the President has not asked from Congress any expression of opinion as to what should be the true boundary line, but only asked for notice to terminate the treaty, which latter, the giving of the notice, I hold belongs to the law-

making, in common with the treaty-making power, it is right that we confine ourselves to the record, and act only on the subject suggested by the President, as on that only he wants light.

It is not necessary, now, to estimate the precise importance of the territory to the United States, either in a social, political, or commercial point of view, although, on this view, I had desired to offer some remarks; but, pursuant to my pledge of brevity, I will proceed at once to the discussion of the propriety of giving or withholding the notice recommended by the Committee of Foreign Affairs.

As preliminary, it may be taken as true that all American statesmen believe that our title to Oregon, from the 42d to the 49th parallel of north latitude, is clear, and, beyond question, better than that of England; and, as to that part between 49. and the Russian line 54° 40', our own statesmen have differed, some supposing England's best—others ours, and others that neither had a perfect title. It is true that both England and the United States now assert, and have always asserted, title to the whole of Oregon. And, in 1818, when the popular mind in both countries had not quieted down from the high excitement occasioned by the late war, they, after an unsuccessful effort to compromise their conflicting claims, in the spirit of peace, and for the purpose of removing all subject of contention likely to perpetuate the then existing feeling of exasperation, in a treaty signed on the 20th October, in that year, agreed that all Oregon, with its harbors, bays, creeks, and navigation of its rivers, should be free and open for ten years thereafter, to vessels, citizens, and subjects of both Governments; and, just before the expiration of the ten years, the two Governments, by another treaty, agreed that the first treaty, should be further indefinitely extended, and continued in force till one should give the other due notice of twelve months of a desire to annul and abrogate the treaty. Neither having given the notice the treaties are in full force; and all statesmen, without regard to party, who respect the faith of treaties, who would preserve unsullied the national honor, concede it as a question too plain for argument, that no step can be taken by us to the exclusive possession of the country till we have given the notice required by our most solemn and long respected treaties.

All, or nearly all, on this floor regard Oregon of great prospective value to us; and I, for one, do not under-estimate it; but, look upon it as that, upon whose possession or loss depends the loss or gain of the commerce of the East; a commerce whose munificent rewards and wealth are not within the reach of present calculations.

Mr. Chairman, differ as we may and do on many subjects, yet on this we all, to some extent, occupy common ground. Differ as we may, as to the mode of obtaining the desired end, yet we do not differ in our common desire of obtaining, or rather retaining, Oregon, and that, too, honorably, and without an appeal to the fearful arbitrament of the sword. The only question is how can this which should, and I doubt not is, the anxious desire of every man on this floor, be accomplished? Gentlemen who have expressed their sentiments here may be classified as those who are for action; those who are for inaction; those who are for assuming open ground, and giving the notice to annul the treaty as to the joint occupation of Oregon; those who are against all forms of notice, but who say that our people ought to be encouraged to visit and settle the territory. Thus, in fact, taking possession of Oregon under the implied sanction of the Government—keeping the treaty to the letter, but breaking it to the faith. This policy wears, to my mind, the aspect of weakness, duplicity, and cowardice; and its practice will result in war, whose disasters and horrors will not be lessened by its being *dishonorable* war.

Believing that procrastination is not likely to advance our claim to the territory, but that our delay is strengthening British title, and is involving this whole subject in embarrassments, complicated and numerous, and which may terminate in the loss of Oregon and will result in war, I, for one, am for action. I am for giving the notice, not in the language of the braggart or the bravo, affecting neither to fear or care for the hazards and evils of war, but in language mild and courteous, yet manly and firm, expressing the determination to abrogate the treaty, coupled with an expression of opinion that the conflicting claims of the two Governments should be settled by honorable negotiation. The notice should be given, *not as a war*, but emphatically as a *peace*, measure.

In the spirit of perfect justice, we should assert title to no more of Oregon than that which can be maintained by argument, and for the propriety of which we can appeal to God and man, and which we are willing, if need be, to refer to the decision of the sword. Like a wise and sensible farmer, who anticipates the possibility of a long and vexatious law-suit with a neighbor, in relation to a doubtful or disputed boundary between adjoining farms, we should plant our fence clearly within our own lands, so that when the hour of trial comes we can make our right manifest. Upon a question like this, on whose momentous issues hang the world's peace and all its blessings, or a war, the clash of whose conflicts, the din of whose disastrous battles would be heard throughout the world, if our rulers were like political managers in a canvass, or hucksters in the markets, either to advance the interests of themselves or to secure a good bargain, to assert claim to more of the territory than was clear, they would deserve, and they would receive, the indignation and scorn of all good men, for conduct whose infamy could only be equalled by treason itself.

The question, then, presents itself, which of the forms of notice shall we take—that proposed by the Committee of Foreign Affairs, or that by the gentleman from Alabama, (Mr. HILLIARD,) which proposes to confer on the President discretionary power of giving or not the notice: that suggested by the gentleman from Connecticut, (Mr. ROCKWELL,) or that by the gentleman from Georgia, (Mr. KING;) or any of the various amendments and propositions which have fallen so numerous and rapidly on the clerk's table, that it is difficult to keep their count, much less by name designate them.

The ground has been taken by some that no notice whatever ought to be given by this House, because it is said Congress has no constitutional power so to do, and such acts belong exclusively to those departments of the Government clothed by the Constitution with power to make treaties. Plausible as is this view, and taken, as it has been, by some very able gentlemen, it appears to me specious rather than true, cautious rather than correct. All that England has a right to require, is the will of the people of this nation, who are its sovereigns, expressed through some reliable and organized body; and, whenever that will is so expressed, whether through the Executive, or President and Senate, under their treaty-making power, or Congress, as the power representative of the whole people, England would have no right to refuse the notice because it was not constitutionally given. I am satisfied that, if the President of the United States were upon his own responsibility to give this notice, Great Britain could not raise the question of constitutional power. No, sir; as the chief executive officer of the nation, the only functionary through whom our intercourse with foreign nations can be conducted, as the representative of the people, whose voice is the concentrated expression of twenty millions of freemen, a notice given by him would not, could not, be questioned by any foreign government. The President has not thus chosen to act. I will not say that he ought so to have acted. He has appealed to Congress for the exercise of its power in giving this notice—for this body, which directly reflects and represents the interests and wishes of the people, who are to be the sufferers or gainers by our wise or unwise action, who are to be blessed with peace or cursed with war, and who are to reap the profits of that peace, or bear the heavy expenditure of money and blood of that war, we ought not now to shrink from an expression of opinion as to the best mode of extricating the Government from the difficulties and perils which embarrass it.

And, though those difficulties and perils have resulted from the unwise action of the President and his party leaders, and, religiously, I believe they are chargeable with it, yet we should not, who are Whigs, refuse to pursue the dictates of patriotism; but, forgetting party in the loftier considerations of duty to the country, we should now not so much enquire how the dangers have been produced, but do they exist, and how shall they be most honorably avoided or successfully met. I do not doubt that gentlemen, who have thought the opposite course as best, have been governed by patriotic considerations, but differ with them in their sense of present duty.

That this Oregon question is now involved in difficulties that never before beset it, that those difficulties have been produced by the would-be leaders, but, in fact, wire workers, of the Democratic party, is perfectly clear. Sir, the forcing this question of



Oregon and Texas into an unnatural coalition with those of a bank and a tariff, its being, without reference to consequences, urged into the Presidential canvass, have greatly embarrassed the negotiations of our Government. That miscellaneous assemblage of gentlemen and patriots, known as the Baltimore Convention, the fruit of whose labors was the nomination of Mr. Polk and the passage of the Oregon resolution, who met for the purpose of nominating a candidate for the Presidency, and the proclamation of the principles on which that nominee was to be elected; instead of confining themselves to principles which relate to the domestic administration of our Government, unfortunately for the country took its foreign policy under consideration, and announced the remarkable resolution which I have before mentioned. They threw a new element of strife into the party contest, and gave beginning to these very difficulties which now beset us, and whose termination the most sagacious cannot foresee. The President, feeling himself instructed by the resolution, announced, in his inaugural address, that our title to Oregon was clear and indisputable. His officious, if not official, organ—and, perhaps, both officious and official—reasserted the same; and though the President, in the mean time, had offered to compromise by a surrender of part of the territory—all north of the 49th parallel—on its rejection, broke off all negotiation, and in his annual message to Congress reaffirms our title to be good to the *whole*, and declares that he believes no compromise which the United States ought to accept can be effected, advises the giving of the notice to terminate the Convention, and says that at the end of the year's notice we shall have reached a period when the national "rights in Oregon must either be abandoned or firmly maintained, and that they could not be abandoned without a sacrifice of both national honor and interest."

This language and this tone, Mr. Chairman, of the President, adds another difficulty in the way of giving this notice, because the President seems to regard it as one of a set of war measures. He either intends to bully or fight, and he has thus brought this whole matter to a crisis: and in a crisis like this the people's representatives are, by their peculiar relation to the people, particularly called on to express their conviction as to the course to be pursued; and the Whigs on this floor, from the fact that they are trammelled by no party dictation, committed by no Baltimore resolution, are in the position to act calmly and patriotically. I trust, nay, I know, they will give the President no factious opposition, but will unite with his friends, and give the notice which he asks. We have gone too far to retrace our steps with honor. Safety is only in advance. But, under a sense of all the responsibilities which now surround Congress, I hope, it will take only such steps as are perfectly right, and make no advance but that which it will be able to maintain before Christendom, and to the maintenance of which we can pledge the honor of the people and power of the nation. And, having determined to bring this long pending controversy to a close, we should take our ground, step by step, peaceably, yet bravely; and, in making our *ultimatum*, it should be that, not of the President, not of politicians, but of the whole American people, which they would maintain by sword and battle.

I answer the question what sort of notice shall be given, by saying, that the notice which may be given, should be qualified by the expression of opinion, that the whole matter of difficulty should be adjusted by negotiation; that it can be so adjusted, and honorably, I cannot doubt. My only reason for preferring some modification, such as suggested above, is, that the naked notice, as reported by the Committee of Foreign Affairs, looked upon as one of that series of measures recommended by the President and which may terminate in war, has a warlike aspect; and though assured by its friends on this floor that its purpose is peaceful, yet the very fact that this purpose is the subject of debate, even among the friends of the Administration themselves, proves its questionable character. And, sir, like the ghost in Hamlet, it is difficult to say *whether* it be

"An angel of health, or golden damned—  
Bring with it airs from heaven, or blasts from hell."

On a question like this our position should not be debatable—should not be the subject of a doubt—it should be pacific, manly, and firm.

It is objected further, Mr. Chairman, that if notice be given it will produce war. It is not

probable that any notice *in itself* will produce war. But much will depend on the intention with which it is given, and that intention must be gathered from its tone and language, and from the Executive and Legislative acts which have preceded and will succeed it. If this Government intend it as a challenge—if it be flung as a gage of battle at the foot of a haughty and a hated foe, in the same temper will it be lifted. If it be the blast of the trumpet which summons to the field of honor and of mortal fight, then will the answering defiance be heard, and the armed foeman cannot avoid the lists. The shock of the conflict will be inevitable. If, on the other hand, we intend this notice as only the more earnest and anxious expression of our desire for the amicable and honorable adjustment of this long protracted controversy, now perilous to the peace, prejudicial to the interests, of both Governments, and every day becoming more complicated and more perilous, in a corresponding spirit will we be met, and peace be its result. It is right that we should make it in its face and form, as it professes to be in its design and purpose, a peace measure. Peace is a blessing of such inestimable value—war is a curse of such infinite evil—that the one should be cherished and cultivated, the other be shunned and avoided, by all honorable means. Sir, we all profess a desire for peace; it is the condition necessary to the welfare of the Republic—to the development of its vast and various resources—necessary to the successful prosecution of its commerce, its agriculture, and its manufactures. It is that which has so benefitted and blessed us, which, like the dews and sunshine, has fallen upon our land, and “clothed it with beauty as with a garment.” And that statesman, now, who by his rash and inconsiderate, much less his reckless and wilful action, breaks that peace, will deserve, and receive, the curses of God and man. It should be the habitual policy of this Government to cultivate peace with all nations; as a matter of principle to avoid war, with the weak as well as the strong. We should not seek it with the weakest and most depressed of the nations, with even the down-trodden and impotent Mexican. His very weakness should be the guarantee of our justice, his inability to avenge a wrong the surest appeal to our magnanimity, and the strongest assurance that we would not, we could not, insult, much less strike him.

The firm and conscientious conviction of the correctness of this policy constituted one of the reasons which led me to oppose the immediate annexation of Texas, she then being in a state of war with Mexico. I apprehend that it might result in the annexation of war: and though the war was not to be a dangerous one, or very bloody, yet it was to be an unnecessary one. But permit me to say, Mr. Chairman, that, from the passage of the joint resolution by Congress, and its acceptance by Texas, the whole question was changed; a contract was made by our Government with Texas, and, by every consideration of honor we should have fulfilled that contract, and at every hazard. Nothing but dangerous and protracted illness prevented me from voting for the bill, which in fact admitted Texas into this Union, for I do not feel towards her as the gentleman from New York, (Mr. CULVER,) who addressed the committee last night, who remarked, he did not regard her as a sister legitimately born into the family, and therefore he did not cordially receive her. I feel for her the kindest sympathy, and welcome her into the family circle as one of the sisterhood of States, henceforth entitled, with the others, to an equal participation in the blessings and protection of the great family dwelling. In the same policy I would have the Government to avoid war with England, not from the motives and considerations which some gentlemen have so forcibly referred to: not because, as some have said, we are weak and she strong—because we are defenceless and she armed at all points, and exhaustless in the munitions of war; not because, as some gentlemen have said, that her Island Queen sits throned upon an empire whose shadow covers the world; not because her proud flag, in the day of battle, will be upheld by well appointed and invincible veterans; not because her war steamers and her well built and countless ships of the line upon the wing of the wind and wing of the flame shall cover the ocean, and sweep every sea with their destructive and irresistible fire. But I would avoid war with Great Britain, because we have not resorted to all proper and honorable means for an amicable adjustment of the controversy, and therefore war must be deemed unnecessary, and

consequently highly criminal. And much as that territory is worth to us—and were it worth ten times told the wealth of the Indies—its value is still not so great that it should be retained at the heavy and inordinate expense of reckless and unnecessary war, the crime of wholesale murder, which the world's wealth could not expiate, or the world of waters wash away. We should not scruple to modify the notice in the manner indicated, when no evil can result from it; and all admit there is nothing dishonorable, nothing humiliating in it.

I have said that the intention of this notice will be gathered from, and the controversy of war and peace depend, to some extent, on the subsequent action of Congress; and as one of the measures which may so affect the notice and the whole subject, the bill introduced by the Committee on Territories stands first and foremost, particularly conspicuous in obnoxious objections. The draughtsman of the bill, and chairman of the committee, (Mr. DOUGLASS,) was in remarkable haste in the introduction of this bill; and doubtless some of its manifold imperfections are attributable to the great and unnecessary haste in its preparation. And the gentleman himself, after the subsidence of zealous and fiery haste, has withdrawn the bill for the amendment and corrections of "second sober thoughts." But as I do not purpose here debating that, I shall only allude to its defects. I do not hesitate to declare, if that bill passes in its present shape, it cannot but be regarded as a cause of instant war. It would be a violation of the treaty, for it asserts title, by boundary, to the whole of Oregon; it grants lands in any part of the territory, on the north as well as south side of the 49th parallel, in the very centre of the disputed and debatable land that lies between the 49 and 54 40 parallel, and pledges the honor and whole power of the nation to make good the grant; it establishes block houses, forts, and stockades; and this bill, or another on your table, provides for raising the men who are to garrison these forts, stockades, and blockades; thus, in itself, before notice is given, taking, in violation of the letter and spirit of the treaty, exclusive possession of the whole country, and shutting out all hopes of a compromise of our claims to Oregon, and must involve us in war. Suppose, however, the notice be given, such as I have contended for, and be unaffected by any rash action on our part, what possible pretext, what ground for war? The treaty itself, as has been often remarked, provides for the notice, and could give no just reason, or even excuse, to Great Britain, for war. If, however, she were to take offence, why, we being in the right before, let the guilt and consequences of a war be on her head.

The reasons which have produced conviction on my mind, that, if the notice were given, we will not have war, are briefly:

The inconsiderable amount of territory which is now in real dispute, our Government has four times substantially proposed to England to settle, by taking, as our northern boundary, the 49th parallel—England has four times substantially offered to compromise, and take, as her southern boundary, the 49th parallel, till it struck the Columbia river, and thence down the river to its mouth, in about 46th parallel. Thus, it may fairly be inferred, the country between the Columbia and 49th parallel is, in fact, only the subject of controversy. It is impossible to suppose that two such mighty empires can, in this day of Christian influence and enlightened feeling, be brought into conflict for a territory, compared to the losses which each would sustain in the conflict, of insignificant value. And I must say that, for one, I estimate highly, in producing and preserving the peace of the world, the influence of the Christian religion—an influence which, though not seen on the throne, yet is above the throne; which is not audible about the high places of the earth, but which, with its inaudible and potent spell, surrounds the rulers of the earth, and gives direction to their courses. It would be a reflection on our common religion to suppose that two such nations as England and America, the bulwarks of Christendom, should fight for cause so small as that in controversy between them.

Again, sir, nations do not go to war now with the same ease and readiness they did in times past. The habits of peace multiply interests in favor of its continuance, and beget the desire for its perpetuation. England, and we ourselves, have been affected in the same way. She is not so warlike as she once was. With a change of interes,

there is a change of policy. Once, owing to her insular position, England regarded conquest as necessary to extend her dominion, and increase her rank and influence among continental nations. Then chivalry was her spirit, and proudly and bravely did she manifest it—war her policy, and fiercely and successfully did she pursue it. Her bold barons and stout men-at-arms, in hard fought fields, added conquest to conquest, till her flag floated over a larger territory than that of any power on earth. But commerce and manufactures are the sources of her wealth, and the means of her power; and peace is necessary for their prosperity, and she carefully preserves it. England of the nineteenth century is not England of the 16th century. The England ruled by the Guelphs is not England ruled by the fiery Plantagenets, the haughty Tudors, or the stern and uncompromising Protector. England, commercial and manufacturing, is not England, feudal and chivalrous. Her interest being in peace, she will not rashly go to war. By your gasconading on this floor—by insults in diplomacy, you may, if you want a fight, obtain it; for England, like ourselves, holds such relation to the world, she cannot safely, without risk of her own destruction, have her power to avenge insult, and right wrong, made the subject of doubt. By bravado and menace—by the exhibition of an exacting spirit, we may place her in such condition, that she may have to forego all the benefits of peace, and hazard all the evils and losses of war; for England has not lost all the feeling which once led her soldiers to the field. The great men who rule a country, are almost always the types of its people; and you see in two of her prominent rulers the fair representation of the feelings of the English people. Sir Robert Peel, nominally connected with the Tory party, is yet the idolized defender of the commercial and manufacturing classes. He is cool, sagacious, and pacific; and, in English, politics stand in bold and conspicuous relief, and gives the strongest assurance of peace. In grim repose, and behind him, however, stands the hero of Waterloo, ready, if English honor be assailed, or if we force the fight, to lend his iron arm and iron nerve to enforce the resolves of Parliament. I am one of those who would not recklessly provoke the war, but still I am among that number who think, that if war come, we can, as in times past, again maintain the honor and interests of the republic against all the power of the English monarchy, led by the iron Duke himself. All I purpose saying is, that England has too many interests dependant on peace, and particularly peace with us, lightly to break it; and it will not be broken, unless the designing or reckless bluster of braggarts and demagogues force the strife. The predictions which some gentlemen have made on this floor have been amusingly falsified during this debate. Those gentlemen who were so fortunate as to get the floor soon after the discussion opened, and were opposed to notice, made the most violent appeals to our fears, based on the most confident predictions, that any action by Congress, and that the very recommendation of notice in the message, would result in instant war, and the then expected English steamer would bring the startling intelligence that England had instantly, to the whole world, made proclamation of her wrongs and of her preparation for battle. But that steamer came, and the news is, that England is more than usually pacific. I never participated in those fears, or believed those predictions; I knew she wanted the repeal of your tariff, which fosters and protects your own people, and gives impulse and continued progression to the prosperity of this country. She wanted your mechanics, your manufacturers, your laborers, your farmers, made tributary to her; and she well knew this only could be done by the repeal of your tariff, to obtain which, and the assurance of its never being re-enacted, she would give you all Oregon and Canada to boot, and then make a good bargain. And, sir, the President in this same message, which recommends notice, also advises and insists on the repeal of the tariff. Thus, though one part of the advice might be calculated to excite, the other part was to soothe; and the prospect of the speedy destruction of our tariff, a consummation by her most devoutly to be wished, keeps her in a state of almost perfect quiet. There is too much reason to fear, Mr. Chairman, that some sort of a trade is about to be made by the British Government and this Government, in which the settlement of the Oregon question is to be the price for the repeal of the tariff. The union of these questions would be exceedingly unfortunate; each ought to rest on

its own merits, and be determined accordingly. I have referred to this to show that England is watching the interests of her manufactures, and is willing to sacrifice territory to maintain them.

Again, sir, the extent of her commerce and her inability to protect it will prevent England from rashly going to war; numerous as are her ships of battle, yet her ships, freighted with rich cargoes, are still more numerous, and comparatively unprotected; she, always sagacious, knows that the first gun which is fired in this war will be the signal to call the eagles to the carcase, and proclaim a richer harvest to the privateers and pirates than ever before was yielded to the reapers of the seas. Those nations who have long hated England for her naval and commercial supremacy, (never disputed but by us,) would then feel that, like Shylock, having a hated enemy on the hip, right greedily and fully would they feed their ancient grudge.

But, sir, gentlemen who have argued against notice, upon the ground that it would produce war, have continued to dwell on the power of Great Britain and of our weakness; they look only on one side of the picture. Powerful as she is, yet in the midst of that power are the elements of weakness; and our want of preparation for war, which gentlemen have said was our weakness, is the very condition which gives us ultimate strength. Why, if we were fully prepared for war, if we had a large standing army, (independent of the discontents produced by increased taxation to support it, and the dangers from its force being turned upon ourselves,) consciousness of that power might beget arrogance and rapacity, and it might be we should then be too ready to listen to the valorous suggestions of the gentlemen who have declared that they never would be satisfied whilst any other nation held a foot of territory on the American continent: and our armies, now under the lead of the high spirited and gallant gentlemen from Illinois and Michigan might be engaged in a crusade, *re-annexing* and *re-occupying* all the territory on the American continent, driving all other nations from its possession, and, to borrow the beautiful language so common in this debate, "planting the American eagle over every foot of soil from Terra del Fuego to the North Pole. But, sir, seriously, for defensive war we are always sufficiently strong to maintain our honor against the world in arms. For offensive war, we can never, till war comes, be prepared. But England has dangers, commercial and political, internal and external, which greatly weaken her. (It being announced to me that I have only six minutes left of my hour, I can only glance at them.) Her proximity to the continent of Europe, that spirit now at work there, the dangers to the old monarchies consequent on the death of the King of the French, whenever it may happen, and according to the course of nature in a few years, the discontent at home, her enormous public debt and its incidental evils, the restless agitation of Irish repeal and Irish emancipation, our proximity to the Canadas, all suggest dangers to English rulers sufficient to make them desire a war, least of all with the United States; for much as she might injure us, it is not more than we could her. All must admit that each on the other could inflict incalculable evil.

Again, there is no honor involved in our maintaining our rights up to 54 40; none in Great Britain maintaining hers up to the mouth of the Columbia river. If it were a question of honor, then it were useless to urge compromise to the people of the United States, on whom "dishonor's breath would light as the whirlwind on the waters." But our most sagacious diplomatists have offered a compromise. Mr. Polk himself has offered compromise. England has done the same. We differ only as to the terms of compromise. Our ablest statesmen, in the most cunningly contrived arguments on our title, have never been willing to claim as their "ultimatum" all the country up to 54 40. Now, surely, gentlemen will not contend that the people, who are to pay the taxes, and bear the burdens, and fight the battles of the war, are to fight for that which the diplomatist in his argument has never contended for, and the President offered to give up. It has been said by some of the most fiery of the gentlemen, that our title is good to 54 40, and that then, it being a question of right, there should be no calculation of consequences, no compromise; and if war comes, let it come. There is no sensible, prudent man, in his private affairs, governed by argument so simple, by reasoning so foolish. That man who in private life contends for every thing which is his, and has it, or has a law

suit for it, soon is hated by his neighbors, gets into endless and vexatious law suits, and ends his career a bankrupt—a striking and practical exemplification of the folly of his rule of action. And that nation who would adopt for its government such a maxim, and contend for every thing which it thought was hers, would only on a larger scale exhibit the folly and madness of the principle of its government, would lose infinitely more than it would gain—be involved in interminable and bloody wars. God deliver this people from rulers whose administration would be based on principles so foolish, and which would prove so disastrous in consequence. This question is emphatically and peculiarly one for adjustment by negotiation, not by arms. No man contends that we can take and maintain Oregon by the sword, without an enormous increase of the standing army and navy, and incurring a debt of more than two hundred millions of dollars, besides the loss of many of the lives of your best and bravest citizens. And suppose you determine to have the “whole or none,” and to fight for the whole, and you commence that war, and through long years of heavy and oppressive taxation, through countless exhausting and bloody battles, till the very earth and the seas are red with the blood of your children, still you must arrange the controversy at last by negotiation—by treaty. The people and their voice is omnipotent here. The people of England are not voiceless now on questions in which their interests, their lives, and property are involved; and they, the great body of the people of both countries, do not desire a war each with the other, let restless and aspiring rulers plot and plan as they do for their own aggrandizement, they will not suffer themselves to be involved in all the horrors and losses which that war will produce.

Sir, this question ought to be settled by negotiation. How much we ought to claim must be left to the treaty-making power; and expression, at this stage of the controversy, might only embarrass the President, and do more harm than good. I believe no time will ever come for an honorable and amicable settlement of this question more auspicious than the present. And the considerations which I have presented have induced the opinion, on my mind, that it can be settled by negotiation, and that there will be no war, unless the war result from the want of ability of the President and unskilfulness of his diplomacy. If the President be what he ought to be—if he were far less than what the people took him for when they, by their votes, lifted him to that high place he now fills—a place whose honors are more to be coveted than “the costliest robe which ere was wrapped round regal limbs”—there would be no danger of a war; for, in the present condition of England, without the grossest blunders on our part, we need not apprehend a war, if the notice be given. These remarks have been made on the supposition that no new correspondence has taken place between our Government and Great Britain; that the state of the question, so far as negotiation is concerned, is the same it was when Congress commenced; for I cannot suppose that the President has received or made any proposition of settlement without communicating the same to us. It would, in my opinion, be highly reprehensible in him, when asking our advice on this matter, not to give us all the information in his power, but ask us to leap blindly, and in the dark.

But if notice be withheld, Mr. Chairman, and that policy advocated by those opposed to notice be pursued, I believe war, and the probable loss of the territory, will be the consequence. They say—“delay your notice; England is too strong yet; she is getting old; soon she will be weak; and then—we bide our time till then. In the mean time, let the treaty remain; give no notice to terminate; send your men—your hardy and bold pioneers—to cultivate the soil; cover it with military posts, and garrison them with men;” and thus, whilst the treaty stands in full force, in violation of its provisions, take exclusive possession of, and prepare to fight for, the whole of Oregon. We have been told, if notice be given, it will produce a *punic* war; but it seems to me if it be not given, and these suggestions followed out, we will have ultimately a war—at least, produced by *punic* faith. Sir, this policy, advocated by honorable gentlemen, and doubtless from a conviction of its wisdom and patriotism, is as wise as that of the foolish bird which hides its head, and supposes its body hid. This policy of waiting and biding our time, is compared eloquently to the waiting of

the American eagle, preparing for its stroke. It sounded rather to my ear like the hissing of that other emblem which (in the group of statuary above your Speaker's chair) attends the Goddess, and types her wisdom—rather like the hissing of a serpent. It had, at least, the serpent's guile, if not its wisdom.

But, independent of bad faith and violation of national honor, which would result from the policy of the advocates of delay, war is rendered far more probable, than by the open, manly, and frank course urged by advocates of notice. Emigration is accumulating a population in Oregon, from this country and from England. It is important to have the rights of the respective countries determined as soon as possible, because settlements will be made by American and English citizens in the debatable land—each Government will feel bound to protect its citizens; conflicting laws enforced by courts of conflicting jurisdiction, together with the difference resulting from political tendencies and principles of two sets of occupants—one American and republican, the other English and monarchical—will greatly increase the probabilities of war. But time prevents me from dwelling on this topic.

Besides the danger of war, let not gentlemen estimate too lightly the possibility of losing this territory by delay.

For the purpose of attaining the same ends Great Britain and the United States pursue different courses, and none more so than in colonizing and settling distant territory. We send as our pioneers the bold hunter, with the rifle on his shoulder; we send the industrious tiller of the soil. The British Empire sends as her pioneers a colossal corporation, with powers of government, and its agents, servants, soldiers, trappers, and traders, are the only settlers; all its acquisitions, however, of territory, enure to the Empire, whose agent it is. It is not important here to calculate the comparative efficiency of these different modes of colonization and settlement, but the past success of England, by a similar course in another hemisphere of the earth, warrants us at least in being on our guard. A hundred years ago Great Britain had chartered an East India Company, whose nominal business and legitimate powers were confined to a trade in tea and silk. Divisions and dissensions existed in the Mogul Empire, and in the midst of which an aged monarch, who had long held power, in the stately language of an ancient chronicler of his glory, breathed his last, and left the splendors of the Imperial palaces of Delhi. Those dissensions opened into rebellion, and the question as to whom should be his successor, to those palaces and power, became one of exciting interest. Little was it thought that a company of traders would, in behalf of a nation fifteen thousand miles distant, successfully assert a claim to the dominion of East Indies. But it was asserted, and England, with that far seeing sagacity, and that far reaching ambition, which has characterized her course and gradually enlarged her power for five hundred years, commenced a series of efforts of both arts and arms, which has resulted in winning for her a more extensive and valuable territory than she has ever added to her dominions by either ancient or modern conquest. And now she has on the western coast of America another company, whose object and purpose is professedly to trade in furs and peltry. But, still holding the soil, it settles for the use of the government which gave it charter. Let no man say that this Hudson Bay Company, bearing, as it does, vice regal power among the infant settlements on the waters of the Pacific, and amid the wilderness of Oregon, with its forty military posts, its thousand trappers, traders, and soldiers, and its numerous Indian *allies*, and with that vast magazine of Indian tribes which the mad policy of the Government, for years past, has been increasing, and from which this company can draw at pleasure men for fighting or annoying the settlers. I say, let no man assert that this company is to be slightly estimated as an auxiliary to British ambition and British designs on Oregon.

But, if this question of notice is to be kept open much longer, there will, I fear, be soon a party in this country for war; at present none such exists. It will be mingled with the strifes and excitements of another Presidential contest; and, under the inflammatory appeals of party leaders, popular feeling in this country may be roused to such extent as to demand a war. Sir, in my opinion, it is unwise longer to delay the notice.

The constant agitation of this question, affecting as it does the probabilities of peace and war, must prove injurious to the prosperity of the nation. Uncertainty and doubt on these probabilities must produce constant and prejudicial fluctuations and changes in the commerce and business of the country, to prevent which, all ought to desire to bring this subject to an adjustment as speedily as possible. To its honorable and pacific adjustment, notice is a preliminary and necessary step.

By refusing this notice, you do not, sir, arrest, you only increase the agitation of this subject. You may fold your arms, you may silence your tongue; or you may, on the contrary, by the most persuasive or violent efforts, attempt to stay this question in its course; but in vain. Influences and interests are at work which irresistibly hurry it on to a fortunate or unfortunate termination, to a peaceful or hostile issue. It is the part of wisdom to direct, when it cannot control the current.

If the policy which I have advocated be pursued, peace, I trust, and firmly believe, will be its fruit. Should, however, after we shall have done all that brave and honorable men ought to do, to avoid the conflict, our adversary, in her arrogance and vaunted power, force on a war, then we stand acquitted; and upon her let fall the blood and crime of that war, in all its accursed and damning guilt. Our ancient foe again will find that a united and brave people, such as ours, are always invincible. We will again show that we are able to maintain our honor in the field against Great Britain, and, if need be, against the world in arms.

I will not, Mr. Chairman, as some have done, make the contingency of war the pretext for a high-wrought eulogy on my native State, Kentucky. Her brave people need no eulogy. Her history in the past is her pledge for the future. The blood of her children, poured out upon "an hundred battle-fields" in the past war, gives the strongest assurance—stronger than words—how she will bear herself again in any succeeding fight. I can say, with perfect sincerity, for my constituents, and for Kentuckians generally, that, though they want no war, if war come, without any reference to party distinctions, forgetful of party divisions, remembering only the common danger and their common brotherhood, Democrats and Whigs, with equal patriotism and equal valor, will stand side by side, ready to repel the foe which threatens to invade the soil; they will not be the last to go, or the first to quit the field.





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